

**Meals on Wheels & CANASP**  
**Testimony to the Appropriations Committee**  
**March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023**

**H.B. 6659: AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2025, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR**

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My associates and I are here to speak on behalf of the Connecticut Association of Nutrition and Aging Service Providers (CANASP), which is comprised of the nine regional providers of Elderly Nutrition Programs (ENPs) throughout the state. CANASP provides meals on wheels and congregate meals, and meal programs are an integral part of preventing malnutrition in senior citizens and provide a vital service for older Americans statewide, many of whom are low-income.

I am here to offer my testimony on the Governor's budget proposal with regard to the DSS and DADS appropriations. While we appreciate the State's continued recognition of the problems Elderly Nutrition Programs currently face with the budget's proposed increases to both Elderly Nutrition and the Connecticut Home Care Program, as well as last year's allocated ARPA funding which we will fully utilize to get us through 2024, we believe we are at a critical junction in respect to overall program funding and the eventual fiscal cliff the Meals on Wheels program will face once that critical federal aid discontinues.

Meals on Wheels programs continue to operate in a COVID 19 economy and due to the pandemic and its lasting effects, providers have faced ever increasing costs associated with supply chain issues, wages and retaining staff, inflation, and gasoline. In addition to these increasing costs, there has also been an increase in demand for senior meals, which has remained high since the start of the pandemic. Due to Connecticut being an older state, population statistics tell us that the last of the Baby Boomers will be turning 65 thus adding to an already aging state population, and as a result the number of requests will continue to increase in many regions.

Elderly Nutrition Programs were ready to serve our seniors on day one and continue to hold strong during the pandemic, keeping seniors safe and supplying nutrition and daily wellness checks. During all of this, Connecticut's Meals on Wheels Programs put our capability to serve in full view and despite increasing costs we continue to innovate on the fly and create new policy and procedure daily as needed. It is evident that you understand the importance of community-based services like Meals on Wheels and the positive impact that those services have on keeping seniors healthy and independent in their own homes.

The meals we provide enable seniors to remain in their homes, benefiting them by preserving their independence and benefiting the state by saving funds that would otherwise be used for more expensive institutional care. Not only do delivered meals ensure that our seniors are eating nutritious foods regularly, they also offer personal contact which is essential to older adults living alone in their community. Half of all persons at and over the age of 85 need assistance with instrumental activities of daily living (IADLs), including obtaining and preparing food. Meals on Wheels serves to address those needs. Furthermore, many of the most common chronic conditions – hypertension, heart disease, diabetes, and osteoporosis – can be prevented or risk-reduced with proper nutrition. Among Medicare beneficiaries, those with multiple chronic conditions are the heaviest users of healthcare services; because the prevalence of multiple chronic conditions is higher among home-delivered meal recipients than for the general Medicare population, the provision of healthy meals and nutrition

counseling is important to helping such individuals avoid more serious and more costly medical care. Access to healthy meals is essential to the wellbeing of Connecticut's senior population and beneficial to the state's fiscal position in the long-run.

In closing, we appreciate the State's continued recognition of the problems Elderly Nutrition Programs face and its awareness of Meals on Wheels providers' continued perseverance during the COVID 19 Pandemic, but we also urge the Appropriations Committee to consider further increasing funding levels to the Elderly Nutrition line item in order to support and maintain providers who continue to face increasing costs as a result of the impact of COVID-19, the impending ARPA fiscal cliff, and inflation. In order to adequately maintain the services we provide, our specific ask from the State is an additional \$2,000,000 to the Elderly Nutrition line item under DADS. We are happy to make a chart available for you, if requested, that explains financial losses MOW providers have faced and losses that will be made even worse once federal ARPA support eventually comes to an end.

Thank you for your support of this crucial program and the senior citizens that rely on it!

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